



# State of Connecticut COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Central Office ~ 25 Sigourney Street, Hartford, CT 06106

*Promoting Equality and Justice for all People*

## Labor and Public Employees Committee January 31, 2017

### Testimony regarding HB-5210

#### **AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS PAY EQUITY AND FAIRNESS MATTERS**

Good morning/afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Porter, Senator Miner and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Cheryl A. Sharp and I am the Deputy Director of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities ("CHRO"). The CHRO investigates and prosecutes claims of discrimination including claims of unequal pay. The CHRO supports House Bill 5210 "An Act Concerning Various Pay Equity and Fairness Matters". This proposed bill would have a direct effect on the cases we handle.

This bill aims to correct years of pay inequity for women in our state. According to most recent statistics from the United States census the average woman in the state of Connecticut earns 82 % of what the average man earns. That gap widens if you are a woman of color or a woman with a disability according to the most current American Community Survey (ACS) questionnaire. The gender pay gap has lifelong repercussions. In 2015, it contributed to a higher percentage of women living in poverty and effected retirements benefits that are earned over the course of an individual's employment. Even taking into account lifestyle choices such as education sought, time away from work spent parenting, women still earn less which is likely due to discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

The provisions of this bill seek to correct these statistics. Preventing employers from asking for prior wage information prior to making an employment offer stops the perpetuation of discrimination from one employer to the next. Our sister state, Massachusetts has a similar law. This type of law creates a system where an employer pays what it thinks the position is worth based on the candidates experience and education rather than perpetuation of a discriminatory cycle. Similarly, a prohibition from using prior salary as a defense in a pay equity case helps to foster a system where people are paid what they are worth rather than keeping people where they are in terms of earning potential. California has a similar law.

The law allows employers to use a recent good faith self-evaluation of its pay practices aimed to eliminate gender-based wage differentials as a defense to a pay equity charge. The CHRO believes this is a fair give and take and further helps break the pay inequity cycle.

The CHRO also supports the provision of the bill that protects workers from pay inequities post pregnancy or FMLA leave. That aspect of the bill is helpful to support workers who are recovering from a disability or taking precious time off to care for a family member.

The CHRO **supports HB-5210**. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

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<sup>1</sup> AAUW The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap Fall 2016 edition.